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SUBJECT: CROSS SECTARIAN, MODERATE BLOC FORMING IN IRAQ?

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a November 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani and Fadhila CoR member Nadeem Al-Jabbari said they are working to form a moderate issues-based, cross-sectarian bloc in the CoR. They hope to build on what they claim is public disillusionment with religious party politics and advocate reforms, transparency and an end to quota-based sectarianism in government. The bloc would strengthen the CoR's oversight role of the GOI and oppose corruption without regard to sect. Mashadani pledged support for the idea and says he is confident that it could gain a following among political leaders and with the Iraqi public. End Summary.

MODERATES MUST UNITE

¶2. (C) CoR Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani told the Ambassador that he has taken seriously NSA Hadley's suggestion that Sunnis seek moderates from both sides and find consensus on issues. Mashadani told the Ambassador he went to Jordan during the Ramadan CoR recess, where he met with other "patriotic Iraqis" who had not taken an active part in the political process until now and found many willing partners for a new cross-sectarian political bloc.

¶3. (C) Traditional alliances are fading, Al-Jabbari told the Ambassador, as the Iraqi public is disillusioned with religious party politics and sectarian quotas for government positions. Iraqis are criticizing their elected officials and the Shiite religious scholars (marjaeeya) that encouraged the public to vote for them. Fadhila party members, Al-Jabbari continued, are some of the few voices in Shiite Itilaf bloc who opposed the appointment of PM Maliki on the same sectarian basis as former PM Al-Jaafari. Fadhila believed from the start that this quota system was a bad mechanism for job distribution and would ultimately lead to disaster for Iraq - and they had been right, Al-Jabbari argued. The solution is to call for a gradual break-up of the Shia coalition, according to Al-Jabbari. He announced this to the media in Cairo recently.

¶4. (C) Shortly after his announcement, Al-Jabbari said, an Itilaf delegation came to visit and asked why he was behaving as an enemy to the bloc. However, many Fadhila members and others agreed with the concept, he opined, their support would strengthen over time as many waited to see what "strong personalities" led the way. Fear of violent reprisals was a concern for many potential allies, Mashadani pointed out. Anyone who joined the new bloc would need increased security as a guarantee of their safety.

GOALS OF THE NEW BLOC

15. (C) Al-Jabbari envisions a group of 60 CoR members (Fadhila currently has 15) forming the nucleus of this moderate bloc. He said that the group would be to "activate parliamentary oversight" of GOI ministries and call for an end to corruption, acting as a whistleblower regardless of sect. The oversight group would consist of CoR members and objective, apolitical government outsiders.

CHANCES FOR SUCCESS

16. (C) CoR Speaker Mashadani said he would work "behind the scenes" to support the new bloc, and said he was certain it would appeal to the Iraqi public. But in order to succeed, he cautioned, the bloc would need sufficient finances, and neighboring country and international support. The Ambassador noted that for the group to succeed, it must be composed of genuinely committed individuals who believe in the project, not opportunists.

17. (C) Comment: In late June, moderate Sunni CoR member and businessman Wathab Shakir Al-Dulaimi, disillusioned with religious party politics, circulated a petition in the CoR calling for the formation of a similar moderate group. A number of CoR members signed, but nothing ever came of the initiative and Al-Dulaimi subsequently left Iraq. But after four months of parliamentary experience, some CoR members see the benefits of cross-sectarian, issues-based alliances. Iraqi People's Conference (IPC) CoR member Dhafer Al-Ani, former chair of the regions committee who resigned his post in protest of the regions law and departed to the Emirates, has been making press statements in support of forming such a bloc. National Dialogue Council (NDC) CoR member Abdulnasr

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Al-Janabi expressed support for this plan to the Ambassador on Nov 3 (septel). Embassy will closely watch how successful he and other proponents will be at gaining broad-based support.
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